

Cardiovascular Health

In Alabama, cardiovascular disease (CVD), including heart disease and stroke, is a leading cause of death. Many people have high blood pressure and are at risk for a stroke and do not realize it.

A stroke is a medical emergency. A stroke happens when either a blood clot or a ruptured vessel stops the blood going to the brain. Sometimes strokes are called a “brain attack.” When the nerve cells in the brain do not get oxygen they cannot function and often die. The parts of the body controlled by those brain cells are then unable to function. For example, you could lose the use of an arm or leg, or the ability to speak. Strokes are a leading cause of long-term disability in the United States. The risk factors for stroke that you can control are:

- high blood pressure
- smoking
- high cholesterol
- physical inactivity
- overweight/obesity

The symptoms of a stroke can be learned with the “**FAST**” acronym.

F: Sudden weakness or numbness of the **Face**, arm or leg on one side of the body.

A: Sudden numbness or weakness in **Arm** or leg on one side of the body.

S: Loss of **Speech**, trouble talking or understanding what others are saying or loss of sight
– Sudden dimness or loss of vision, particularly in one eye.

T: Time Loss = Brain Loss. Call 911.

Stroke is the number one cause of adult disability and the third leading cause of death in the United States. Although strokes affects people of all ages, genders and races, people over 55, males and African-Americans are at higher risk for stroke.

There are two types of strokes. Transient Ischemic Attack, or TIA as it is often called, is when a blood clot clogs an artery for a short period of time. This is sometimes called a warning stroke. The symptoms are much like a major stroke; however, they last for a shorter period of time. A hemorrhagic stroke is when a blood vessel ruptures and bleeds deep in the brain or on the surface of the brain.

Blood pressure is the force of the blood pushing against the walls of the arteries as the heart beats. When resting, the heart beats about 60 to 70 times in one minute. When you are active, it beats faster. Each time it beats, blood is pumped out into the arteries. How hard the heart beats effects the pressure or force the blood has.

High blood pressure is called the silent killer because it usually has no symptoms. It develops for several reasons. Once high blood pressure develops, it usually lasts a lifetime. The good new is that it can be treated and controlled.

Regular physical activity is essential for a healthy life. Physically inactive people are almost twice as likely to develop heart disease as people who are physically active. Inactivity is almost as much a risk for heart disease as cigarette smoking, high blood pressure, or a high cholesterol level. Being physically active is one of the most important steps you can take to prevent or control high blood pressure. It is easy to become physically active. The goal is to do 30 minutes of a moderate-level activity on most, and preferably all, days of the week.